

The Fall of the Dictatorship

I. Introduction

President [Ferdinand E. Marcos](http://malacanang.gov.ph/presidents/fourth-republic/ferdinand-marcos/) (<http://malacanang.gov.ph/presidents/fourth-republic/ferdinand-marcos/>) assumed power on December 30, 1965, and became the second president reelected to office in 1969.

There were efforts to maneuver the 1971 Constitutional Convention to permit his continuing in office.^[1]

With the swell of student radicalization and increasing number of violent demonstrations, Marcos played up middle-class fears and used these to justify the imposition

(<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/featured/declaration-of-martial-law/>) of Martial Law

(<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/featured/declaration-of-martial-law/>) on September 23, 1972 by virtue of Proclamation No. 1081 (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1972/09/21/proclamation-no-1081/>).

Martial Law was not just an invocation of the President's emergency powers under the 1935 Constitution (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1935-constitution-ammended/>),—Marcos went further to assume all governing powers, excluded civilian courts, and systematically replaced the 1935 Constitution with the 1973 Constitution (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1973-constitution-of-the-republic-of-the-philippines-2/>) for his own ends. The replacement of the Constitution was done under dubious circumstances.

First, Marcos ordered a *viva voce* plebiscite on January 10–15, 1973 in which the voting age was reduced to 15 to ratify the new Constitution.^[2] Military men were placed prominently to intimidate voters. Reports indicated that mayors and governors were given quotas for “yes” votes on the constitution and negative votes were often not recorded.^[3] Results report that 90 percent of the citizens have voted for the

constitution even though some communities did not participate in the “citizens assemblies.”^[4] Over the next few years, Marcos would hold four more plebiscites—in 1973, 1975, 1976, and 1978—through citizen assemblies to legitimize the continuation of martial rule.^[5]

Second, he intimidated the Supreme Court to approve it. Using the stick and carrot method on the justices of the Supreme Court, President Marcos was able to force the Supreme Court to uphold martial law and the new constitution. Previously, around 8,000 individuals, including senators, civil libertarians, journalists, students, and labor leaders, were arrested and detained without due process upon the declaration of martial law.^[6] With many of them filing petitions to the Supreme Court for habeas corpus, they challenged the constitutionality of the proclamation. However, the Supreme Court issued its final decision, in *Javellana v. Executive Secretary*, which essentially validated the constitution. This would be the final legitimizing decision on the constitutionality of Martial Law: in G.R. No. L-35546 September 17, 1974, the Supreme Court dismissed petitions for habeas corpus by ruling that martial law was a political question beyond the jurisdiction of the court; and that, furthermore, the court had already deemed the 1973 Constitution in full force and effect, replacing the 1935 Constitution.

After the landmark decision, Chief Justice Roberto V. Concepcion went into early retirement, 50 days before his originally scheduled retirement date, in silent protest over the majority in the *Javellana v. Executive Secretary* case. He argued against the validity of the new constitution and its questionable aspects, together with Justices Claudio Teehankee, Calixto Zaldivar, and Enrique Fernando.

Martial law imposed government control over all forms of media. On September 22, 1972, Marcos issued Letter of Instruction No. 1 (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1972/09/22/letter-of-instruction-no-1-s-1972/>), ordering the Press Secretary and Defense Secretary to assume control over all media outlets. All periodicals were padlocked,^[7] and media personalities who had criticized Marcos, his family, or his administration were taken to Camp Crame without any charges being filed. Among them were publishers Joaquin “Chino” P. Roces (*Manila Times*) and Eugenio Lopez Jr. (*Manila Chronicle*), and columnists Max Soliven and Luis D. Beltran.^[8]

Marcos issued at least eleven Presidential Decrees that suppressed press freedom. Journalists who did not comply with the new restrictions faced physical threats, libel suits, or forced resignation.^[9] With such stringent censorship regulations, most of the periodicals that were allowed to operate were crony newspapers, such as Benjamin Romualdez’s *Times Journal*, Hans Menzi’s *Bulletin Today*, and Roberto Benedicto’s *Philippine Daily Express*. These newspapers offered “bootlicking reportage” on the country’s economy while completely eschewing political issues.^[10]

Hence, President Marcos' absolute rule had a "cloak of legality"^[11] and incontestability, making it nearly impregnable. However, specific factors converged and eventually led to the fall of the dictatorship and the eventual restoration of democracy in the Philippines.

II. Factors that led to the Fall of the Dictatorship

A. Opposition to Martial Law in the 1970s

Popular anti-Marcos sentiment existed for the duration of Martial Law. According to David Wurfel, there were three paramount types of opposition to martial law during the 1970s: reformist opposition, revolutionary opposition, and religious opposition.^[12]

Reformist Opposition

The reformist opposition, also known as the legal opposition, was composed of members of the upper-middle class. Using nonviolent tactics, they advocated political (not necessarily socioeconomic) reforms. However, the reformist opposition was not a united movement, but an amalgamation of different middle- and upper-class groups who had different motives. It was for this reason that Marcos tolerated them, so long as they were incapable of viably replacing him or attaining the support of the masses.^[13] David Wurfel writes:

Disunity within the reformist opposition also reflected the diversity of interests and the lack of ideology within the middle class. The reformers shared certain values, such as support for the rule of law, constitutional legitimacy, free elections, and the protection of personal freedoms, and they agreed on the need to replace Marcos. But they agreed on little else. On nationalism, land reform, and the autonomy of labor organizations there was everything from explicit demands to complete silence. Once discussion went beyond the basic characteristics of the political process, the question of what to reform was a divisive one.^[14]

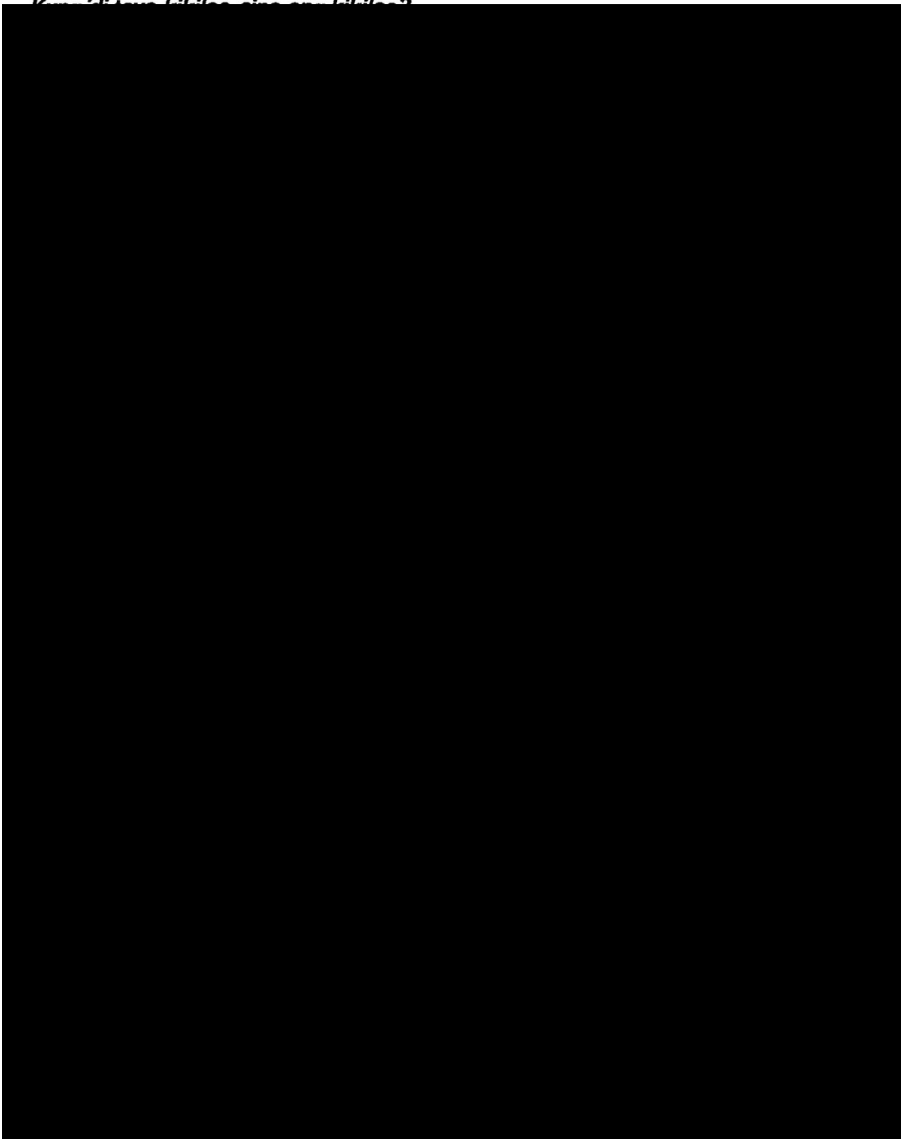
1978 was a watershed year for the reformist opposition because it was the first election year in the country since 1969. The reformist opposition was divided on the issue of boycotting the Interim Batasang Pambansa (IBP) elections set for April 7.

Senator Gerardo "Gerry" Roxas refused to reactivate the Liberal Party for the elections because Marcos failed to address their concerns regarding electoral reform; to participate in such an unfair election would have given it credibility, and the Martial Law regime undue legitimacy.^[15] Jose W. Diokno, a former

Nacionalista and long-time critic of Marcos and Martial Law, was also adamantly opposed to the IBP elections.^[16]

The most prominent opposition movement that participated in the IBP elections was the newly formed Lakas ng Bayan (LABAN) party of former senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr., who was imprisoned at that time.^[17] Ninoy was initially apprehensive about running in the election, but he decided to push through with his candidacy to give the populace a chance to air out their frustration against the government. He campaigned from his jail cell, even appearing for a 90-minute television interview.^[18] Ninoy’s candidacy inspired an outpouring of popular support that culminated in a noise barrage on the evening before the elections. At 8:00 p.m., residents in Metro Manila took to the streets, making whatever noise they could “to let Ninoy Aquino in his prison cell know that the people had heard his message.”^[19] They banged on pots and pans, honked their car horns, and shouted their throats sore in support of Ninoy and LABAN.^[20] However, the elections were a total shutout for LABAN, with Marcos’ Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL) winning 91 percent of the seats in the IBP.^[21]

Kung 'di tayo kikibo, sino ang kikibo?
Kung 'di tayo kikibo, sino ang kikibo?



Ninoy Aquino's manifesto for the Lakas ng Bayan (LABAN) campaign for the elections. Photo from *Ninoy: The Willing Martyr* by Alfonso P. Policarpio Jr.

In 1981, Marcos officially lifted Martial Law, but since all decrees issued during that time were still in force, the lifting was merely a symbolic gesture. In the June presidential elections of that year, he ran under the KBL, his main opponent being Nacionalist Alejo Santos. Unlike in the 1978 IBP elections, the reformist opposition was united in its stance to boycott the polls, labeling it a sham after Marcos refused the conditions they had previously proposed, such as a minimum campaign period, a purging of voters' lists, equal time and space for the opposition, and a reorganization of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC).^[22]

Revolutionary Opposition

The government's use of communist and secessionist threats as justification for Martial Law only contributed to the growth of the political opposition and the amassing of recruits to the New People's Army (NPA)^[23] and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the provinces in the 1970s.^[24]

When Martial Law was declared, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was immediately mobilized. Formed by students and politicians from Mindanao, its goal was to create the Bangsa Moro Republik (Moro National Republic), composed of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) attempted to seize their "illegal" firearms supplied by Libya, sparking a war that lasted from 1973 to 1977.^[25]

Over the course of the war, 13,000 people were killed while over a million were displaced. At the height of the conflict, the government spent an estimated \$1 million a day to contain the rebellion. However, internal problems within the MNLF prevented them from exploiting Marcos' weakness. Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso write:

Its military leaders lacked combat experience and suffered major battlefield losses, while its political leaders split along ethnic lines (Tausug versus Maguindanao) over tactical issues. As the MNLF lost on the military front, its politician allies also began to defect, making separate peace pacts with Marcos and presenting themselves as a "moderate alternative" to the revolutionary Moro nationalists. Government overtures and the cooperation of conservative Arab states eventually led to negotiations and a de facto cease-fire in 1977. The MNLF was no match for Marcos diplomatically and the decline of Arab support made the continuation of conventional warfare impossible. . . . By the time Marcos fell, the MNLF had lost its dynamism as well.^[26]

In contrast, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) strengthened as Marcos' dictatorship weakened; as opposed to the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), which surrendered in 1974. Following the principle of "centralized command, decentralized operations," the CPP established autonomous, regional, self-sustaining chapters all over the Philippines. Not only did this give CPP cadres more freedom to experiment with tactics appropriate to their localities, it also helped them survive the loss of many original leaders, either to prison or death.^[27] In November, 1977, the Armed Forces scored an important victory over the communist rebels with the capture of Jose Maria Sison and other important party leaders leading to the disarray of the Communist Party. But the triumph was short-lived and was too late as the influence of the CPP grew stronger within the provinces.^[28]

Party growth was fastest in areas where human rights violations were high due to military presence. By the late 1970s, the CPP could claim a guerrilla force of 15,000, around the same number of cadres, and a “mass base” of around one million. While AFP forces also experienced rapid growth during this period and were better equipped, there was a difference between the two. Gregg Jones writes that “[d]espite a high rate of illiteracy, communist soldiers could explain why they were fighting and what they were fighting for. In contrast, most government soldiers were poor peasants or slum dwellers who enlisted in the government army not out of political conviction but because of economic deprivation.”^[29]

Through the Kilusang Mayo Uno (the May First Labor Movement) and the League of Filipino Students, the CPP was able to gather labor unions and solidify its control of important schools. The CPP also made “anti-imperialist” alliances with nationalist senators like Lorenzo Tañada and Jose Diokno, who could lend credibility and publicity to claims of the Marcos government’s human rights violations.^[30]

Religious Opposition

Martial Law also faced opposition from the religious sector. Mainline Protestant churches have been vocal in their opposition of the dictatorship since 1972; by 1978, they were holding mass protest actions, and by 1981, they held boycott campaigns for the April plebiscite and the June presidential elections.^[31] Meanwhile the Catholic Church, which sympathized with Marcos’ anti-communism, maintained a position of “critical collaboration” while paying attention to the opposition among its members.^[32] This allowed it a degree of autonomy when it came to carrying out their social projects, which focused on alleviating poverty and defending the poor against communism. However, the provincial clergy started becoming radicalized after seeing the effects of the Marcos dictatorship on the poor. They formed Christians for National Liberation, which clandestinely used Church “social action” programs to get foreign funding through private donor agencies that shared the same views.^[33] Abinales and Amoroso write:

Church leaders were appalled by this radical infiltration, but could do little about it. To attack its own rank and file for following the official Church position on human rights and social justice would open the hierarchy to charges of supporting the dictatorship. A serious breach opened up within the Philippine Church.^[34]

When Jaime Cardinal Sin replaced the conservative Rufino Cardinal Santos as Archbishop of Manila, one of his first acts was to issue a letter condemning the summary arrest of Jesuit Frs. Jose Blanco and Benigno Mayo. They were arrested during a raid on the Sacred Heart Novitiate in Novaliches, in 1974. Sin

presided over a prayer vigil for the detained priests, “which more than 5,000 persons attended, the largest anti-martial law protest at the time.” In 1975, Sin declared his opposition to a Marcos decree “banning all labor strikes.” US President Gerald Ford was visiting Manila, so Marcos beat a hasty retreat and confined the prohibition to strategic industries. The harassment continued. Church-owned media, which had escaped closure in 1972, was shut down in 1976–1977, among them the weekly newspaper and radio station of Bishop Francisco Claver’s diocese in Bukidnon, Davao’s radio station, and Church magazines in Manila. The government threatened to tax Church properties and subject them to urban land reform. Sin’s policy of “critical collaboration” during this time began to give away to active resistance, as the religious indignation spread over the continuing arrests and more of the clergy became radicalized. Sin may have thought to steal the thunder from the radical priests by hurling the bolts himself. Protestant groups began to rally against Marcos in 1978. By 1979, Sin was firmly on the path to his preeminent role in the overthrow of Marcos.^[35]



About 5,000 demonstrators, organized by students, attempted to march to Malacañan Palace on October 10, 1976 to protest at four years of Martial Law imposed by President Ferdinand E. Marcos. Its main purpose was to protest at the referendum-plebiscite scheduled to take place on October 16. Video from Associated Press.

On January 17, 1981, in an effort to calm the growing opposition of the Catholic Church, President Marcos lifted martial law (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1981/01/17/speech-of-president-marcos-during-the-termination-of-martial-law/>) (if by name only) via Proclamation No. 2045

(<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1981/01/17/proclamation-no-2045-s-1981/>) in preparation for the first state visit of Saint Pope John Paul II (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/state-visits-ph/papal-visits/>) on February 17, 1981.

Lifting of Martial Law, January 17, 1981



[WATCH: Lifting of Martial Law, January 17, 1981 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PhnfzqMYhg&list=PLlcUoXKTZ0KUusbLYosc9_MRTeY_OFptfB&index=10)]

On January 17, 1981, on Constitution Day (8 years after the 1973 Constitution was promulgated), President Ferdinand E. Marcos decreed Martial Law officially lifted. In this video excerpt, President Marcos reads from Proclamation No. 2045. Video from PTV4.

In the events leading to the important state visit, the Coconut Palace was commissioned by First Lady Imelda Marcos to be built at the cost of ₱37 million as the guesthouse of the Pope. However, the Pontiff refused, saying it was too ostentatious, given the state of the poor in the country.^[36] Moreover, during his visit in Malacañan Palace, the Pope delivered a speech explicitly condemning the human rights violations committed under the regime. He said:

“Even in exceptional situations that may at times arise, one can never justify any violation of the fundamental dignity of the human person or of the basic rights that safeguard this dignity.”^[37]

Since then, the Catholic Church had withdrawn its support of the Marcos administration.

B. Marcos' Health and the Issue of Succession

As early as 1979, the health of President Marcos had been deteriorating.^[38] This was kept a secret at first, but it was common knowledge then that Marcos was already sick, especially at the time of the assassination of Ninoy Aquino.^[39] Marcos' health status worsened by mid-November of 1984. Blas Ople, Marcos' Minister of Labor, divulged the situation for the first time on record on December 3, 1984, saying that Marcos was "in control but cannot take major initiatives at this time." He stated that, "The health of our leader is undergoing certain vicissitudes, problems which started a year ago."^[40] On October 28, 1985, according to congressional and US intelligence sources quoted by the *Washington Post*, Marcos was diagnosed with an "incurable, recurring sickness" called *systemic lupus erythematosus*.^[41] This disease was further complicated by Marcos' diabetes.^[42]

Marcos' failing health, coupled with the looming threat from the anti-capitalist left, led to widespread concern for a stable succession among the country's economic elite—the main beneficiaries of Martial Law's crony capitalism.^[43] The plebiscite held on April 7, 1981, ratified the constitutional amendment creating the Executive Committee, composed of at most 14 members, at least half of which were Assemblymen.^[44] The Committee was meant to be "a stepping stone for future leadership in the country . . . a high-level training ground for future Prime Ministers and Presidents."^[45] It was deemed necessary at that time because no one member of the administration's Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL) was deemed capable of taking over for President Marcos in the event of his death, resignation, or incapacitation; it was implied that the Committee member who performed the best would be Marcos' successor.^[46] Contenders for the presidency started positioning themselves to gain the upper hand. For instance, there were attempts to discredit Prime Minister Cesar Virata and the programs associated with economic technocrats, while Imelda Marcos' strove to repair her tarnished image (especially in the provinces) while pushing her son Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. further into the public eye.^[47]

However, Marcos' deteriorating health necessitated clearer guidelines for determining a successor. Another plebiscite on January 27, 1984, ratified the constitutional amendment abolishing the Executive Committee and restoring the Office of the Vice President,^[48] to be filled in the upcoming 1987 elections^[49]—which never came because Marcos announced snap elections in 1985. The same plebiscite also designated the speaker of the Batasang Pambansa as acting president should the presidency be vacated before the 1987 presidential elections.^[50]

Ousted President Marcos and Imelda Marcos in exile at the backyard of their villa overlooking Honolulu, Hawaii on March 1988. Diagnosed with systemic lupus erythematosus, he had several surgeries for kidney dialysis a year after this photo was taken. Marcos died on September 28 of the same year, due to heart, kidney and lung failure. Photo by Gamblin Yann.

C. The Collapse of the Philippine Economy

Economist James Boyce commented, "If the central aim of economic development is the reduction of poverty, then the Philippine development strategy in the Marcos era was an abysmal failure."^[51] In the last years of the Marcos regime, the Philippine economy was almost grinding to a halt. This was so, despite the fact that the Marcos administration implemented its three-pronged development strategy: (1) The green revolution^[52] in agriculture^[53], (2) growth and diversity in agricultural and forestry exports, and (3) massive external borrowing. The profit from these three strategies were amassed disproportionately to the wealthiest in the population, thereby causing a large disparity between the rich and the poor.

In the case of agriculture, the higher rice yields saved land for export crops and saved foreign exchange for non-rice imports, but these gains never trickled down to the poor. In addition, there were government intervention, cronyism and monopolization of agricultural markets such as that of sugar and coconut.^[54] In these cases, key government agencies were managed by Marcos associates and cronies, whose operations were not audited.^[55]

Sugar was the country's second most important export in the Marcos regime. Specifically, in the mid-1970s, sugarcane plantations doubled to more than 500,000 hectares. This increase, however, did not translate to an increase in harvest and profit, which led ultimately to a stagnation and eventual decline in the mid-1970s.^[56] As early as 1974, a government sugar monopsony was established to participate in world trade and reap the benefits of increasing world prices in sugar. When the sugar market declined in 1975 – 1976, the trading responsibilities were transferred to PHILSUCOM^[57] (Philippine Sugar Commission), headed by Roberto Benedicto, and to NASUTRA^[58] (National Sugar Trading Corporation), headed by an associate of Marcos.

Under Benedicto's chairmanship, the PHILSUCOM was empowered to buy, sell, and set prices for sugar; and to buy and take over milling companies. He also set up the Republic Planter's Bank, which became the sugar industry's main source of finance during that time.^[59] For this, Benedicto was accused of "using his position to great advantage over the past several years to forge an economic fiefdom, to amass great wealth and to develop considerable political influence in sugar growing areas". The US Embassy reported that Benedicto had several profit mechanisms:

- bribery; acceptance of payoffs or bribes from traders lobbying for guaranteed profit margins of sugar prices in the domestic market.
- smuggling of sugar supplies; at least 600,000 metric tons of raw sugar was reportedly missing from the NASUTRA warehouses
- withholding of taxes, PNP loan payments, as well as export trading costs;

These operations "amount to a significant and growing drain on the economy of the country."^[60] Moreover, the sugar-marketing monopoly effectively protected the interests of the sugar hacienderos close to Marcos, while small landowners bore the brunt of the crisis, causing widespread starvation among sugar plantation workers (specifically in Negros), reaching the international media.^[61] Furthermore, other large-scale sugar owners grew resentful of President Marcos because of the sugar-marketing monopoly that did his bidding and the subsequent land-grabbing.^[62] At the end of the Marcos regime, the Philippine sugar industry nearly collapsed. The majority of the planters were in debt and sugarcane plantation dwindled.^[63]

In the case of coconuts, beginning in 1973, the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) monopolized export and increased coconut tax in order to stabilize market prices.^[64] Coconut marketing during the Marcos era was monopolized by a "single entity with effective control over virtually all copra purchases and over the production and sale of coconut oil on the domestic and export markets."^[65] This monopoly was

technically made possible by Marcos' presidential decrees, providing for levies on all coconut production and an establishment of a bank. While these changes were imposed to benefit the the coconut growers, in practice, the main beneficiaries were Eduardo Cojuangco, the so called "Coconut King," and Juan Ponce Enrile, two of President Marcos' closest associates.^[66]

In in the case of foreign loans, the primary pretext was for Philippine domestic investment and building public infrastructure. However, these loans were diverted to a few private companies, all of which were under Marcos cronies, eroding the quality and quantity of domestic investments; the rest were diverted to banks abroad. An example of striking evidence of this was the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant, which was built at the cost of \$1.2 billion but never generated a kilowatt of electricity under the Marcos regime. "The losers were the Philippine people," writes Raymond Bonner, "the poor, on whose behalf the billion dollars could have been better spent, as well as the middle class and the wealthy, who would have to shoulder this economically backbreaking colossus."^[67]

In 1973, Marcos decided that the Philippines had to have a nuclear power plant—then considered the hallmark of a modern nation—because it fit in with Marcos' ostentatious vision of himself and the country. However, such an endeavor at that time was problematic: at best, the power plant would have generated power for only 15 percent of Luzon's population. Security was another issue: there were four active volcanoes located within 100 miles from the proposed site. Furthermore, the Philippines was one of the poorest nations setting out on the nuclear path; only Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea were building nuclear power plants in East Asia, and they were far better off economically and technologically.^[68]

The power plant was the largest and most expensive construction project in the country's history. Given the monumental expense, funding the project out of the government's treasury was impossible, so the government turned to Export-Import Bank in Washington, DC, for assistance. In 1975, \$277 million in direct loans and \$367 million in loan guarantees was approved by Ex-Im Bank chairman William J. Casey, one of Marcos's biggest supporters. It was the largest loan package the bank had approved anywhere.^[69]

Westinghouse Electric initially submitted a vague, undetailed \$500 million bid for two plants. General Electric, on the other hand, submitted four full volumes detailing cost and specifications, conducted nuclear power seminars in Manila, and invited Philippine officials to visit its plant in California. Marcos, brooking no opposition, gave the contract to Westinghouse. After Westinghouse secured the contract, it submitted a serious proposal amounting to \$1.2 billion for just one reactor—almost 400 percent higher

than the original bid of \$500 million. Marcos was guaranteed a cut of nearly \$80 million, which Westinghouse transmitted through Marcos crony Herminio Disini using a “maze of channels, cutouts, and stratagems.”^[70] Raymond Bonner elaborates:

Disini owned a construction company, which he had purchased with a government-backed loan and which had been awarded, without bids, a cost plus fixed fee contract for all civil construction at the nuclear power plant site. The price of the equipment for the project “was inflated, as a way to cover the cost of the fees to Disini,” a lawyer who worked on the project explained to Fox Butterfield of *The New York Times*. Westinghouse set up a subsidiary in Switzerland, which funneled the money into Disini’s European bank accounts. The Swiss subsidiary, after entering into the deal with the Philippine government, assigned the contract to the Westinghouse International Projects Company, which had been established solely to handle the Philippine project. Westinghouse International, in turn, entered into a subcontract with the Westinghouse Electric Corporation, the parent company in Pittsburgh. Westinghouse officials repeatedly denied any wrongdoing with the project.^[71]

By 1986—more than a decade and \$1.2 billion later—the power plant was still not operational.^[72]

Bataan Nuclear Power Plant. Photo courtesy of Vinnell Belvoir Corporation.

The old economic elite, whom President Marcos called the “oligarchy,” relatively tolerated the systematic favoritism of the administration on crony companies. This changed In 1981, when Filipino Chinese business tycoon Dewey Dee of the Binondo Central Bank left the country for Canada, leaving nearly P600 million in debt, seriously compromising the crony corporations. Government banks announced a rescue fund of approximately P5 billion in credit and equity capital, which the old elite found unfair, launching a barrage of public criticism.^[73]

The impoverishment of the economy led to the loss of support of the middle class and the small-time landowners and farmers in the regions on the Marcos administration. Poverty, aside from human rights violations by the military, also became a means for rebel groups to recruit citizens to their cause. In 1978, the strength of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) grew from 6,900 to over 20,000 regulars.^[74] In 1980, the New People’s Army formed 26 guerrilla fronts with over 16,000 regulars, and the Communist Party of the Philippines have attracted 40,000 mass activists.^[75]

D. The Assassination of Ninoy Aquino

After three years of exile in the United States, Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr.

(<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/featured/ninoy/>), the foremost leader of the Marcos opposition, decided to come back to the Philippines, intending to restore democracy in the country.

(<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1983/08/21/the-undelivered-speech-of-senator-benigno-s-aquino-jr-upon-his-return-from-the-u-s-august-21-1983/>), and convince President Marcos for an orderly succession. Previously, Aquino had been incarcerated by the military for seven years before being released for bypass surgery in the United States. Ninoy Aquino’s conversation with journalist Teodoro Locsin Jr. before he went back to the Philippines was revealing.^[76] He was quoted as saying:

“I’ll go to Marcos, if he’ll see me. I’ll appeal to his sense of history, of his place in it. He would not be publishing all those books of his if he did not care for the judgment of history, if he did not want to look good in it. And that would be possible, I’ll tell him, only if there was an orderly restoration of democracy and freedom for our people. Otherwise, there would be only revolution and terrible suffering. I give the moderate opposition five years to restore democracy, after that there will be only the Communists as an alternative to Marcos or his successor. I’ll offer my services to him, but my price is freedom for our people.”^[77]

He departed from Boston on August 13, 1983. Despite news of a death threat, Ninoy maintained in an interview on August 21, 1983 that *“if it’s [my] fate to die by an assassin’s bullet, then so be it. [...] [I have] to suffer with our people and [I have] to lead them.”*

Ninoy Aquino's assassination. Photo taken from Ninoy: Ideals & Ideologies 1932-1983.

Aquino landed in the Manila International Airport via China Airlines Flight 811 at 1:05 p.m. on August 21, and was escorted by armed men out of the plane. Minutes later, gunshots were heard. The former senator was shot dead by an assassin's bullet to the head. When the news of Ninoy's death spread, approximately seven million came to his funeral procession on August 31, the biggest and longest in Philippine history. This singular event further eroded the people's support of the Marcos regime.

E. The Failure of the Snap Election of 1986

In the first week of November 1985, when President Marcos was interviewed in the *David Brinkley Show*, he stated his intention to call for a snap election, even going so far as to invite the members of the US Congress to observe, calling the accusation of fraud as unfounded.^[78] This, it seems, was an attempt to consolidate support and show the United States the legitimacy of the Marcos administration. The announcement for a snap election within three months was ahead of schedule; the next regular elections were supposed to be held in 1987. The President was overconfident; he disregarded the objections of his family, his Cabinet, and his party.^[79] Even First Lady Imelda Marcos, who was abroad at the time, was also reportedly taken aback by the announcement.^[80] However, as recent scholarship suggests, this confidence only showed his isolation from the people whose support on his administration had already waned. Marcos' Labor Minister, Blas Ople writes:

He (Marcos) couldn't say that he was beleaguered and encircled, that he was losing the support of Washington and the international community and that he needed a breakthrough to reestablish his ability to govern. He was never that frank with us but we knew why.^[81]

Marcos had to consolidate his forces if the election would go to his favor. As it was before the declaration of Martial Law, Marcos needed the support of the military. While acting Chief of Staff General Fidel V. Ramos was next in line as the Chief of Staff, the president knew that he needed Fabian Ver back. Ver was on leave, as he was being prosecuted in the Aquino-Galman murder case. By December 2, 1985, Ver and 26 other suspects were acquitted in a legal decision that caused public outrage.^[82]

Meanwhile, prior to the snap election announcement, a "Convenor Group" was formed, composed of Lorenzo Tañada, Jaime V. Ongpin, and Cory Aquino, to select a presidential candidate for the opposition. Cory was regarded as the rightful candidate, the "people's choice," who was also promoted by Jaime Cardinal Sin.^[83] For fear of being left out, Salvador Laurel of the United Nationalist Democratic Organization (UNIDO) and Eva Kalaw of the Liberal Party (LP) formed the National Unification Committee's (NUC).^[84] Laurel was nominated by the NUC's Nominating Convention held at the Araneta Coliseum as the presidential candidate of the opposition party for the coming Snap elections.^[85]

Meanwhile, Cory Aquino announced her intention to run if a snap election was to be held, and if she had the support of a million citizens.^[86] She was successful in gaining this support. The opposition, therefore had two frontrunners: Aquino, and former Senator Salvador "Doy" Laurel. However, in the same year, on December 7 (<https://philippinediaryproject.wordpress.com/1985/12/07/december-7-1985/>), Laurel decided to give way to Aquino. Though initially reluctant, Laurel was eventually convinced that their tandem was the only way the opposition stood a chance against the overwhelming influence of Marcos and the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL), and decided to run as Aquino's vice president. In Teodoro L. Locsin Jr.'s article (<https://philippinesfreepress.wordpress.com/1986/02/07/triumph-of-the-will-february-7-1986/>), in the *Philippine Free Press*, Cory served as the "symbol of unity." He further wrote:

"Cory would be the presidential candidate, and Doy who had spent substance and energy to create *ex nihilo* a political organization to challenge the Marcos machine must subordinate himself as her running mate."

Aquino and Laurel ran together under the United Nationalist Democratic Organization (UNIDO).^[87]

President Ferdinand E. Marcos attends a rally prior to the Snap Elections. Photo by Peter Charlesworth.

Cory Aquino with her son, Benigno S. Aquino III. on the campaign trail, 1986. Photo from Teddy Locsin Jr.

During the 1986 snap elections, President Ferdinand E. Marcos used gender as an issue in his campaign broadcast against rival for the presidency, Corazon C. Aquino. This broadcast warns that a woman would not be able to handle the challenges of the post.

Businessman Jose Concepcion headed a group of concerned citizens to revive the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), established in 1957 after the fraud of the 1949 Presidential election, as the citizens' watchdog on the counting of votes. It had a successful run in the legislative elections of 1984, releasing an unofficial untampered count. KBL attempted to discredit NAMFREL, but due to international pressure, COMELEC gave the watchdog organization official observer status.^[88]

Massive poll fraud and rampant cheating marred the vote on the day of the elections, February 7, 1986. Thousands of registered voters—who had voted successfully in previous elections—found their names suspiciously missing from the lists.^[89] Approximately 850 foreign correspondents flew in to observe,^[90] including a delegations headed by U.S. senators and congressmen, who saw vote rigging happen.^[91] On

February 9, 35 COMELEC employees and computer operators at the COMELEC Tabulation Center walked out in protest due to the wide discrepancy between the computer tabulation and the tally board, showing blatant manipulation of electoral results.^[92] In the countryside, precincts were hounded by the military and ballot-rigging was rampant. NAMFREL, in turn, showed Aquino in the lead with almost 70 percent of the votes canvassed.

Afraid of ruling party goons who have been known to snatch ballot boxes to throw them away or to stuff them with favorable manufactured votes, vigilantes form human barricades for boxes being brought from precincts to municipal halls for official tally. Photo by Ben Avestruz, People Power: The Philippine Revolution of 1986.

On February 9, 1986, thirty-five tabulators manning the COMELEC’s quick count computer terminals walked out during the 1986 snap elections. Photo from Bantayog Museum.

LIST OF 35 TABULATORS WHO WALKED OUT^[93]

Linda (Kapunan) Angeles-Hill	Rory Asuncion	Zoe Castro	Mario Lavin
Myrna “Shiony” Asuncion-Binamira	Bot Bautista	Charles Chan	Thess Baltazar-Roberto
Jane Rosales-Yap	Erlyn Barza	Nori Bolado	Euly Molina-Legro
Cooly Culiati-Medina	Rubi Macato-Slater	Erick Celestino	Nitro Palomares-Castro
Alicia Torres	Dennie Estolas-Vista	Marissa Contreras-Legaspi	Maite de Rivera
Ernie Alberto	Achie Concepcion-Jimenez	Bambi Flor-Sena	Bing Romero-Justo
Marisa Briones-Allarey	Maleen Cruz-Ngan	Naz Gutierrez III	Vangie Saludaes
Marissa Almendral	Mina Fajardo Bergara	Luchie Lavin	Irma Sunico-Buno
Gi Antonio-Silva	Jules Valderrama	Celine Vinoya-Rivera	

By February 15, 1986, in an unprecedented announcement that was met with public outrage, the Batasang Pambansa proclaimed Marcos and Arturo Tolentino as the winners of the presidential and vice-presidential race respectively, by virtue of [Resolution No. 38](#)

[\(http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1986/02/15/resolution-no-38/\)](http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1986/02/15/resolution-no-38/). Opposition assemblymen walked out of the Session Hall in protest.

Twenty-six parliamentary members walk out from the floor of the National Assembly just before the assembly proclaimed President Ferdinand Marcos winner of the February 7 election. The official tally had Marcos the victor over Corazon Aquino by 1.5 million votes. Photo by Jun Briosio.

This led to the opposition's indignation rally in Luneta the next day where Cory Aquino spoke to around two million people in Luneta, in what would be known as the *Tagumpay ng Bayan* rally. At the event, Aquino called for massive civil disobedience and boycott of Marcos-crony owned companies and products. The Aquino-Laurel ticket also proclaimed victory.

The International Observer Delegation, composed of 44 delegates from 19 different countries who observed the electoral process, also released their report citing disturbing anomalies in the election results and subsequent intimidation of voters.^[94]

Supporters of Cory Aquino and Salvador Laurel holding a 'Victory of People' or 'Tagumpay ng Bayan' rally, February 16, 1986. Photo from LIFE Photo Collection.

February 25 was chosen as the day of President Marcos' inauguration.^[95] As inaugural invitations were sent to the diplomatic corps, none of embassies sent their congratulatory remarks to Marcos, except for Soviet ambassador Vadim Shabalin, who was apparently in Malacañan for a courtesy call. When President Marcos informed him of the supposed result of the election, the ambassador offered his compliments, which is now cited as a grave diplomatic error.^[96] The silence of foreign governments alarmed the administration.

On February 22, 1986, Marcos sent Labor Minister Blas Ople and Executive Secretary Alejandro Melchor to the United States, and sent J.V. Cruz and Presidential Assistant for General Government Jacobo Clave to Europe, in a last ditch effort to legitimize his win in the presidency. Roberto Benedicto and Arturo Tolentino were to be sent to Japan, and the ASEAN countries respectively.^[97]

Because of the calls for a boycott of crony companies announced by Cory Aquino, San Miguel Corporation fell in the stock market. The *Manila Bulletin* also lost a significant number of readers.

F. Coup Plot by the RAM

The Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) emerged in 1982 as a small, secret group intent on strengthening military rule through a coup d'état.^[98] Initially, it was composed of Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and a handful of regular officers from the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), who harbored resentment against General Fabian Ver, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

The divide between PMA-trained regulars and officers from the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) was already evident in the early years of Martial Law. Marcos appointed ROTC officers to the top positions in the army, navy, and air force, passing over senior PMA graduates.^[99] When Ver succeeded Romeo Espina as Marcos' Chief of Staff, Ver was quick to isolate his rivals. "Ignoring merit or seniority," writes Alfred McCoy, "he played upon ethnicity, blood, and school ties to pick favorites for key commands."^[100] Himself an alumnus of the University of the Philippines reserve program, he promoted former reservists and retained them even after their mandatory retirement, thus stifling the upward mobility of PMA-trained regulars.^[101]

By early 1985, the RAM was a fully organized group with a leadership committee of 11 men and a membership base of around three hundred. Although relatively small, the RAM had the support of a majority of AFP officers, especially the PMA regulars.^[102] By the middle of the year, the RAM went public, yet popular suspicion regarding the movement's integrity arose due to its inclusion of former military torturers.^[103] Still, most media outlets ignored their human rights record, choosing instead to paint the RAM as reformers.^[104]

Plans for a Christmas coup in 1985 were started in August, but when President Marcos unexpectedly called for snap elections in November,^[105] RAM leaders had to rethink their strategy, and the coup was postponed for the following year. When Marcos was proclaimed the winner in the fraudulent February 7 elections, the RAM leaders agreed to launch their coup at 2:00 a.m. ("H-hour") on Sunday, February 23, 1986.^[106]

The plan was as follows: At 1:30 a.m., Colonel Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan and twenty commandos would cross the Pasig River on rubber rafts and break into the Malacañan Palace, arresting President Marcos and Imelda. At 2:00 a.m. Lieutenant Colonel Eduardo "Red" Kapunan would command a hundred-man strike team to attack the security compound on the southern bank of the Pasig. Using smoke grenades as cover, they would detonate bombs and kill General Fabian Ver. The explosions would serve as a signal for two motorized RAM columns to break through the gates of the security compound. Major Saulito Aromin's 49th Infantry Battalion would launch a simultaneous maneuver, posing as pro-Marcos reinforcements to reinforce Honasan's commandos and secure the Palace. At 2:30 a.m., the Presidential Security Command

would transmit false orders to eight pro-Marcos battalions in the capital to keep them from moving. At the same time, Colonel Tito Legazpi would capture Villamor Airbase and radio RAM units in the provinces to fly to Manila. At 3:00 a.m., just an hour after the coup's launch, Enrile would issue Proclamation No. 1, establishing a revolutionary government.^[107]

Yet for all the RAM leaders' confidence in their plan, they did not have the command experience to successfully carry out the complicated operation, after almost ten years of sitting in air-conditioned offices.^[108] And to make matters worse, Ver knew of the coup. On the Thursday before the planned coup, he summoned his senior officers and engineered a trap. He ordered a navy demolition team to plant bombs and mines along the palace riverfront. As the rebels made their way toward the palace on rafts, Ver would blind them with powerful spotlights. Marcos' son, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., would be brought out with a loud hailer, giving the rebels a final chance to surrender. If the rebels did not stand down, they would be blown sky high.^[109]

The rebels only realized that their plan had been compromised on the Friday night before the coup, when Honasan and Kapunan saw a large number of troops amassing at Malacañang. They informed Enrile about the situation, and the assault on the palace had to be called off.^[110]

The map used by General Fabian Ver to plan out the attack on Camp Crame and Camp Aguinaldo, superimposed onto a current aerial photograph of the area. This map was drawn on a blackboard and remains on display in the Presidential Museum and Library.

Faced with only two options—dispersing or regrouping—Enrile chose the latter as the “more honorable” option.^[111] He announced his defection from Marcos on Saturday night in a press conference at Camp Aguinaldo, alongside Lieutenant General Fidel V. Ramos, Ver’s deemed successor.^[112] In the first critical hours of the uprising, RAM leaders called on former PMA classmates and comrades, pleading for support or at the very least neutrality, thus undermining Marcos’ defenses.^[113]

At 9:00 p.m., Jaime Cardinal Sin made his famous announcement over Radio Veritas, beseeching the people to bring food and gather at Camps Aguinaldo and Crame to support Enrile and Ramos. An hour later, Enrile finally reached Cory Aquino via telephone.^[114] Aquino was at an anti-Marcos rally in Cebu City. She was informed of the coup^[115], but she was also suspicious of Enrile’s motives. Half a day later, she announced her support for the rebellion and asked the people to help.^[116]

On that first night, people came to EDSA by the thousands with whatever provisions they could offer: pans of pancit, boxes of pizza, tins of biscuits, bunches of bananas.^[117] Edwin Lacierda, presidential spokesperson of President Benigno S. Aquino III, was there to witness: “More than a rally,” he recalls, “all of us came to EDSA to break bread and fellowship with all who were willing to stand in the line of fire and take the bullet, as it were, for freedom and change of government.”^[118]

Thus began the four-day EDSA People Power Revolution (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/edsa-anniversary/>). The revolution was a peaceful one, with soldiers being coaxed with food, prayers, flowers, and cheers by people from all walks of life who sat, stood, and knelt in prayer in front of the tanks.^[119] For instance, on February 24, the government-controlled Channel 4 was liberated by women who were sent into the compound to negotiate with the loyalist soldiers.^[120] Church-owned radio station Radio Veritas did a marathon coverage of the revolution; disc jockey June Keithley (<http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2014/02/25/dancing-to-the-tune-of-the-revolution/>), who averaged seventeen hours on air daily over the four days, kept the public informed in between airings of *Ang Bayan Ko*, *Tie a Yellow Ribbon*, and a curiously resurrected political jingle from the 1950s called *Mambo Magsaysay*.^[121]

In the evening of February 22, Marcos personally telephoned General Prospero Olivas five times, ordering him to disperse the crowd at Camp Aguinaldo, because their presence would complicate an assault. A mentee of Ramos, Olivas feigned compliance and countermanded Marcos’ orders. Marcos then turned to General Alfredo Lim, the Metrocom district commander, but Lim was also loyal to Ramos and disregarded Marcos’ orders.^[122]

In addition to the reluctance of Marcos’ officers, Marine Commandant Artemio Tadiar also pointed out the military incompetence of Ver’s plan, saying, “Every inch of the palace was occupied, literally.” “There were [...] over eight thousand men packed so tightly in the narrow streets around the palace that they had no room to maneuver, and reinforcements were still arriving.”^[123]

On February 24, at 5:00 a.m., Marcos was heard over the radio, “We’ll wipe them out. It is obvious they are committing rebellion.”^[124] On that Monday morning, government troops headed by Marine battalions began their advance to Camp Crame from different directions as a dozen of helicopters encircled the camp. At 6:20 a.m., the tensed crowd around the Constabulary Headquarters waited with uncertainty as the helicopters approached.^[125] Wurfel narrates one of the pivotal events of People Power as fear turned into loud cheers from the crowd:

When eight helicopters circled over Camp Crame on Monday morning, fears of bombardment were still high, but they landed and joined the rebels. This was probably the military turning point; thereafter military defections took place at an increasing pace. Yet Ver threatened to bomb and strafe Camp Crame, and Marcos held a press conference where he insisted, "I don't intend to step down as President. Never, never!"

At 8:30 a.m., government troops broke into the rear of Camp Aguinaldo and trained their howitzers and mortars on Camp Crame. By 9:00 a.m., General Josephus Ramas gave the Fourth Marine brigade the "kill order" while civilians were still inside, but the brigade's commander Colonel Braulio Balbas hesitated. Instead, he told Ramas, "We're still positioning the cannons."^[126] Ramas would ask Balbas to attack four times, and each time, Balbas stalled. Marcos lost control of the Marines.^[127]

At around the same time, a rebel frigate anchored at the mouth of the Pasig River had its guns aimed at Malacañan, just three kilometers away. Earlier that morning, Naval Defense Force chief Commodore Tagumpay Jardiniano told his men that he had declared himself for Enrile and Ramos. His men stood up and applauded, and Marcos lost control of the navy.^[128]

At 9:15 a.m., Marcos, together with Ver appeared on television for a Press Conference. Ver requested Marcos permission to attack Camp Crame. But Marcos postured on TV to restrain Ver, saying, "My order is to disperse without shooting them." (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBf2u451Uil&feature=youtu.be>).

^[129] However, when Marine commandant General Artemio Tadiar met with Ver later, Ver confirmed that Marcos approved the kill order on Crame.^[130]

Following a rocket attack from the rebel helicopters, General Ver radioed the wing commander of the F-5 fighters in Manila, ordering them to bomb Camp Crame. Francisco Baula, the squadron leader and RAM member, answered sarcastically: "Yes, sir, roger. Proceeding now to strafe Malacañang."^[131] At 1:00 p.m., General Ver gave secret orders to Major General Vicente Piccio to launch an air attack on Camp Crame, to which General Piccio replied, "But, sir, we have no more gunships. They have just been destroyed."^[132] Marcos lost control of the air force.

After Marcos lost complete control of the military, his presidency came to an end the following day, on February 25, 1986.

Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile (right) is joined by Lieutenant General Fidel V. Ramos as he announces his defection from the Marcos administration. Photo taken from Bayan Ko!

III. Conclusion

From February 22 to 25, 1986, hundreds of thousands of people amassed at Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), Metro Manila's main thoroughfare, calling for the peaceful ouster of the dictator. On February 25, 1986, Corazon C. Aquino (<http://malacanang.gov.ph/presidents/fifth-republic/corazon-aquino/>) and Salvador H. Laurel took their oaths in Club Filipino as President and Vice President respectively. Meanwhile, Marcos was inaugurated in the Ceremonial Hall of the Malacañan Palace and delivered his inaugural address in Maharlika Hall (now Kalayaan Hall (<http://malacanang.gov.ph/about/malacanang/kalayaan-hall/>)) on that same day. Rocked by key military and political defections and the overwhelming popular support for Aquino, Marcos was forced to depart with his family a few hours later for exile in Hawaii, effectively ending Marcos' two-decade long dictatorial rule.

By March 1986,^[133] intelligence sources surfaced indicating that President Marcos was planning to stage widespread bombing and arson operations throughout Manila, so he could impose another martial law—called “Operation Everlasting.” The plan was to neutralize all opposition by arresting all opposition leaders, the entire executive council of NAMFREL^[134] and the RAM rebels in a planned concentration camp in Caballo Island near Corregidor.^[135] Hence, the EDSA People Power Revolution averted a resumption of an oppressive regime that would have curtailed the country's civil liberties in the years to come.

The Philippines had its “longest day” on February 25, 1986, as it started the day with virtually no president, had two presidents by noon, and one president before midnight. TOP, oath taking as President by Corazon C. Aquino at Club Filipino before Associate Justice Claudio Teehankee. BOTTOM, President Ferdinand E. Marcos sworn in Chief Justice Ramon C. Aquino in the Ceremonial Hall, Malacañan Palace.

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